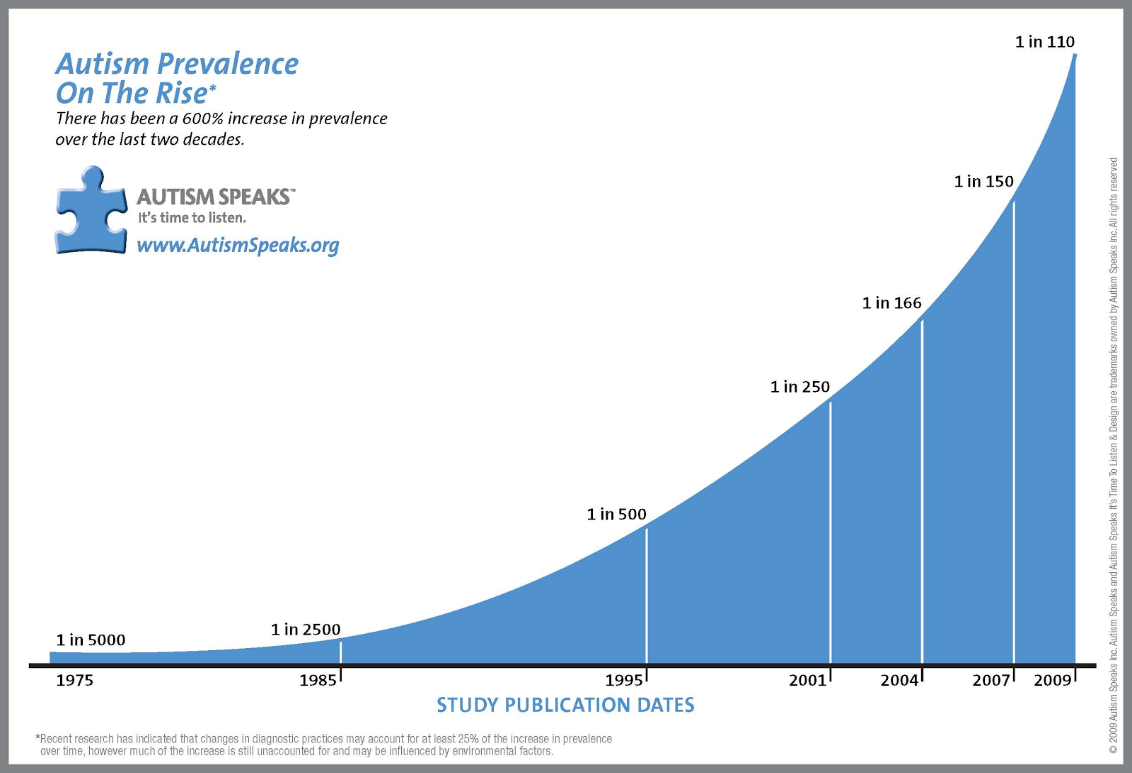
INTRODUCTORY

Language and communication are key factors to our society and its survival today. Without language and communication much of what has happened in our history’s timeline would be completely altered and history would be different. People would not know how communicate with each other if we have no form of language. Communication is vital for all living organisms. All animals have some sort of communication or language between them and their peers to know what is acceptable and what the right thing to do in certain situations is. Language and communication is important to our early child development stage of life, it’s what helps make our life a little bit easier to manage and grow because we learn these skills at a young age and adapt to situations that we would not know how to handle without these skills, yet for some individuals language and communication is a more challenging concept to grasp.

Being able to understand or grasp information that is necessary for an everyday lifestyle can be difficult when there are obstacles blocking that portion of understandance from being learned. There are many factors that could potentially harm a person's ability to learn language and communication, yet our focus is going on be on the Autism spectrum disorder (ASD). “Autism covers a set of developmental disabilities that can cause significant social, communication, and behavioral challenges. People with ASD process information in their brain differently than other people” (Battey). More children today are being diagnosed with some degree of the disorder. This disorder is one that delays and or prevents a child’s ability to learn their own language, which can prevent these individuals from being able to function probably in our society and show signs that are not categorized as the normal way for one to communicate with others. Children with autism need extra assistant to learn to communicate, whether it's verbal or another form, such as sign language, communication is necessary for that child to be able to understand what is happening around them and be able to function with other people.

Today many more children are being diagnosed with autism. As seen in the graph below, the number of children that have been diagnosed just two decades ago compared to how many were diagnosed in 2009 it shows that there has been an increase by 600 percent since 1975 (Autism Speaks). “With the latest estimate of autism prevalence in the United States, as reported by the Centers for Disease Control, was 1 in 110 children,” while back in 1975 the diagnoses were only 1 in 5000 (Autism Speaks). This information could mean several things. Researcher have conducted studies to see what is causing this increase. “The most recent findings suggest that at least a portion of the increase in prevalence can be attributed to changes in diagnostic practices and increased awareness of autism over time, as well as other social factors such as advanced parental age” (Autism Speaks). Yet these cannot be the only factors that are affecting this increase of children diagnosed. Other theories that are being considered for contributing to



the increase is the “criteria for assessing autism  has changed over the last 20 years resulting in a broadening of autism diagnoses and the identification of cases that would not have been diagnosed as such using older criteria” (Autism Speaks). There are many newer types of autism that are being diagnosed now that just 20 years ago would never have been considered. “Another aspect of the autism landscape that has changed over the past 20 years is an increase in the awareness of autism among the general public as well as healthcare professionals” (Autism Speaks). This represents that although more children are being found to be diagnosed with autism this fact however true does not necessarily mean that autism is on the raise, it just shows that people are more aware of the signs of autism and that there are more types of autism that are being diagnosed.

FIRST HEADER

Social Interaction and Communication

When thinking of a typical day for the average person, one would say that they interact with many people through work, school, clubs, church, etc. Yet for children with autism those social skills to interact with others are limited. Again all children with autism are spread throughout a large spectrum that ranges from high functioning autism (HFA) to low functioning autism (LFA) and including individuals with Asperger’s syndrome (AS). These ranges vary depending on the severity of the disorder. Typically all children and adults that have autism have to some degree a social interaction impairment (article 3).  This generally means that people with this disorder do not understand social cues and would have trouble with understanding the norms that the society that they live in has. Along with having no real sense for social cues, people with autism have trouble with communication as well.  “The communication impairment which partially defines autism is closely related to the impairment of social interaction, and includes impaired use of language even when language is present,” this particular impairment can also lead to their ‘nonverbal communication signals’ can be impaired as well (article 3-1). These impairments vary with each individual that has autism, yet all that are affected by this disorder, their “comprehension and use of facial expression, gesture, and vocal prosody is always abnormal, even in individuals with Asperger’s syndrome” (article 3- 2). This factor limits “social abilities” and “can affect their ability to achieve normal development milestones and establish satisfying peer and familial relationships” causing a wall that blocks people with and without autism (article 1-1).

Language Impairment

When it comes down to the importance of a child’s language development, the first few years are extremely vital for infants. The early childhood stage of life is the time they grasp a lot from their surroundings. Children take from what they hear and see and they try mimic and eventually understand what the overall meaning is behind what they are mimicking, however, this is not the case for autistic children. Depending on where the child is on the autistic spectrum, certain areas of language are affected differently. Typically children that are in the high functioning autism side of the spectrum have more of a moderate to severe impairment when speaking about their pragmatics skills, which means their ability to deal with the “problems that exist in a specific situation in a reasonable and logical way instead of depending on ideas and theories” (Webster). When talking about their semantics skills, which is understanding meaning, HFA children have a moderate impairment in this area. Their grammatical skills tend to be mild to moderate impairment, and typically no phonological impairment is seen with children that are closer to the HFA side of the spectrum (article 3). This is not including children that are diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome because their impairment are less severe in the areas of pragmatics and semantics than children with high functioning autism and they tend to show no grammatical or phonological impairments compared to high functioning autism.

Unfortunately, people with low functioning autism tend to have a more severe impairment in all of the four main areas of language. Typically low functioning children’s pragmatic skills are from severe to profound, their semantic and grammatical skills are severe, and unlike children with Asperger’s syndrome or high functioning autism, they do have an impairment with their phonological skills (article 3). Although there is a wide varied of degrees of autism these are typically what one would see when talking or communicating with a child with autism. The question at hand than is what causes these impaired language acquisitions?

Potential Causes

Researchers have looked at what might be the cause for these impairments. There is no known cause for autism yet researchers have developed theories that could be causes for the disorder. When speaking about the “cause for impaired language acquisition in autism is biological, although the impairment can be aggravated by adverse environmental conditions” as well (article 3). The biological theory suggests that a gene that the parents carry was passed on from the parent to the child but the gene was mutated. These mutation “occur more frequently than expected among individuals who have [certain medical conditions](http://www.autism-society.org/about-autism/diagnosis/differential-diagnosis/), including fragile X syndrome, tuberous sclerosis, congenital rubella syndrome and untreated phenylketonuria” (Autism Society). The environmental aspect suggests that the mother of the child could have been taking illegal substances that were harmful for the child before and/ or during the pregnancy itself and increases the risk of autism (Autism Society).

Methods

Since every individual with autism has different degrees to the disorder that vary from others with the disorder, finding methods that are beneficial to a vast majority of children with autism can be a difficult task. There are several different methods that parents could find beneficial for their child. “Treatment for autism is usually a very intensive, comprehensive undertaking that involves the child’s entire family and a team of professionals” (Treatments). Methods vary depending on what the child's needs are and what they need to focus on. “Many children with autism have made remarkable breakthroughs with the right combination of therapies and interventions,” (Treatments).

There are many types of therapies that children with autism can benefit from. “No single therapy works for every child” but with today’s advances in research for autism there are many more to choose from, (Treatments). The more commonly used therapies are Speech-Language Therapy (SLT) and Occupational Therapy (OT). “Speech-Language Therapy encompasses a variety of techniques and addresses a range of challenges for children with autism.”  This therapy is great for most autistic children because it focuses on areas that all autistic children need help with, the only difference is some children are unable to speak, while others are able to talk, which they could have more trouble understanding and expressing (treatments). As for occupational therapy which brings together cognitive, physical and motor skills” and “aims to enable the individual to gain independence and participate more fully in life (treatments). These therapies, like others, benefit a wide range of children with autism. There are more specific types of therapies that children may go to as well for assistance on top or instead of the two above. Again, every child is different and they will not need the same type of therapies that other autistic children need, however there are many more to explore and see which would benefit your child most.

The best method for children with autism is a combination of therapies and interventions. These interventions are aimed at both the family and the child with autism. The intervention that parents are encouraged to partake in is called the Parent Education and Training. “Parent training can be especially beneficial to the improvement of children with AS/HFA. If caregivers such as parents, grandparents, siblings, babysitters, etc. are fully aware of and understand the strengths and deficits of the child, they will be able to incorporate aspects of successful treatment options like social skills training into the child’s life at home”(Intervention). As parents broaden their knowledge of autism, the child can have their own interventions. The most common interventions that parents have their child go to are social skills training and cognitive behavior therapy. As mentioned before social skills are very important to our society, which is why most children with Asperger’s syndrome and high functioning autism attend this intervention. They can learn to “expand and improve their social skills through training and therapy” even if they have “strong language skills” (Intervention). As for cognitive behavior therapy, this intervention focuses on helping “individuals with Asperger’s Syndrome regulate their emotions, develop impulse control, and improve their behavior as a result” (Intervention).

LIVING WITH A CHILD WITH AUTISM

Understanding what autism is, is easy to do when reading facts about the disorder but living with a person who has autism is another is another story. I was able to conduct an interview with an individual that experiences the life of a child with autism and she graciously allowed me to talked with her and ask her a few questions that involved the boy with autism and what they experience everyday with him. The child with autism is eight years old and is in the second grade.

Mother of Autistic Child

When I started interviewing the mother I found that she was very open with all of the questions and was willing to answer anything that was needed for the research. The main discussion we focused on was the boy’s ability to communicate with his family and peers. She emphasized that his communication strengths includes continuing to add to his vocabulary daily, he engages in conversation with anyone and he can repeat dialogue with amazing accuracy (??). Then she continued with explaining his weaknesses which include not responding appropriately to all questions asked of him, his number of exchanges in a conversation is only two or three before he starts talking about something interesting to him and he often gets frustrated when he is unable to understand something asked of him or when we are unable to understand what he wants (??).

What I found interesting that the mother mentioned but the articles did not mentioned was ‘summer school.’ This topic came up when I asked what was done over the summer when school is out and he does not see someone everyday to help him.  She explained to me that her son has been going to summer school for the last three years to keep his academic skills on track and to keep him around other students giving him the feeling of continuous routine that most autistic children need. She also expressed that two years before he started summer school he had his speech pathologist come to our house once a week throughout the summer to go over things. (??). This aspect makes sense to have a child with autism to keep up with his or her school work throughout the summer to try to keep up and to keep his or her mind reviewing information that our society wants them to know.

As we moved forward we started discussing methods that would best benefit him and his type of autism. She expressed that he has been seeing a Speech and Language pathologist twice a week during the school year since he was 2 and a half years old. He has also participated in a social peer to peer group for the last two years facilitated by the school's social worker and his speech pathologist (??).  Are there specific tools that benefit Tyler’s education evolving communication (games, flashcards, etc.)? Tyler’s speech and Language Pathologists (he has had three) have used many different methods throughout the years including sequencing cards, games, toys, picture cards, etc.

Finally we discussed his progress and where he was now compared to where he was at the beginning. “His vocabulary has improved significantly over the years. He initiates conversations all the time now and he did not do that when he was younger. His responses have become full sentences instead of one or two word answers regularly and he starts more conversations than before” (??). She is very proud of her son for his accomplishments in the few years he has been on the earth. He has shown great progress and all are hoping he continues to progressing.

THIRD HEADER

Although autism reported on the rise since 1975, the amount of awareness and knowledge that people have gained over the last twenty years about this disorder is benefiting all those who are diagnosed with the disorder.

Methods- more advances than before

Comparison- mother and facts

Continuous schooling over the summer

HFA vs. LFA

Communication.

\*\*\*Sorry I have not finished yet, but this is my plan on what I will be writing about in the third section\*\*\*